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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000707

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: THE SEDUCTION OF THE WIDOW HARIRI: HOPES FOR
PREMIERSHIP DASHED BY FAMILY, SAUDI ARABIA

REF: EMBASSY BEIRUT 4/23/07 SITREP (NOTAL)

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Further to something we first mentioned in the 4/23/07 daily sitrep, beach resort owner and political gadfly Roger Edde has pursued a far-fetched plan to achieve his long-shot goal of becoming Lebanon's next president: he has dangled before the eyes of Rafiq Hariri's Paris-based widow Nazek the prize of becoming Prime Minister herself. Edde claims to have won the blessings of a less-than-salubrious triumvirate -- Syria, Hizballah, and President Emile Lahoud -- for his plan to have a Nazek Hariri-run technocratic cabinet replace that of Fouad Siniora now, with Edde's own selection as president to follow in the autumn. Edde also claimed to have unspecified USG support, supposedly acquired via contacts of his Amcit wife. The appeal for Nazek would be the opportunity to kick out the usurper Siniora, whom she finds loathsome, and restore what she sees as the rightful Hariri presence in the Grand Serail. MP Saad Hariri and Saudi Ambassador Abdulaziz Khoja separately told the Ambassador on 5/19 that both the Hariri family and Saudi Arabia have vetoed the idea; Talking by phone with French Ambassador Bernard Emie (who was with Ambassador Feltman at the time), Hariri legal advisor Basile Yared reported from Paris on 5/19 that the idea was "dead." Dead but not buried: Walid Jumblatt, suspicious of Nazek's hatred of Siniora, remains nervous that something "fishy" (Jumblatt's preferred adjective for anything benefiting Syria) is up. End summary.

EDDE PLOTS TO REPLACE SINIORA WITH NAZEK;
AN EDDE PRESIDENCY TO FOLLOW IN AUTUMN

12. (C) We first reported, while writing with a healthy dose of skepticism, the outlines of this story in our 4/23/07 sitrep, after Roger Edde himself sketched out part of his thinking to the DCM. On 5/18, we again got wind of this strange tale when Walid Jumblatt called the Ambassador to ask what we knew of the machinations of Edde (best known for his high-end beach resort, home-away-from-home for Lebanon's face-lifted beauties in summer, and his public break with Michel Aoun, when Aoun refused to include Edde on his Jbeil/Keseroun parliamentary ticket in 2005). Jumblatt, always wary of speaking by phone for more than a few seconds, said only that it involved "the Queen Mother," the scrap of a disguise March 14 insiders use to describe the Paris-based widow of Rafiq Hariri, Nazek. "Look into it," Jumblatt urged.

14. (C) In a 5/19 meeting with Saudi Ambassador Khoja, the Ambassador learned more, supplementing what we had included in our sitrep. Edde, a few days earlier, had called on Khoja to seek Saudi blessing for a plan to solve the cabinet crisis. According to this plan, in the coming days, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora should resign, triggering the constitutional collapse of the cabinet. In the requisite consultative process, Nazek Hariri would be nominated by a majority of the MPs as the new Prime Minister. Nazek would name a technocratic cabinet modeled on the Najib Mikati cabinet of 2005 that would oversee Lebanon until presidential elections in the autumn. Given Edde's success in solving Lebanon's long-standing cabinet crisis (that began with the November 11 Shia ministers' resignations from the cabinet), Edde would be the natural consensus candidate to be elected president. Edde indicated that, as a concession to March 14 and to Fouad Siniora, Siniora could postpone his resignation until after the UNSC approves the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

SYRIA, LAHOUD, HIZBALLAH, NAZEK --
EVEN THE USG -- REPORTEDLY ON BOARD

15. (C) Edde told Khoja that, after getting the approval of President Emile Lahoud (whose signature on any new cabinet decree is required) and Hizballah, he traveled to Damascus to brief Syrian intelligence officer Mohammed Nassif Kheirbek (Abu Wael), advisor to VP Farouk ash-Shara and reportedly in charge of the Lebanon portfolio. Abu Wael approved Edde's plan. Edde then flew to Paris to meet with Nazek, in the presence of Johnny Abdo, the Paris-based former head of Lebanon's military intelligence (and who is close to the Hariris). Nazek and agreed. Even the Americans have given a

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green light, Edde said. "Jeff is on board?" Khoja asked. No, Edde responded. While the DCM had been told the broad outlines, Edde said that he did not want to work through the U.S. Embassy. Instead, he went directly to contacts in Washington via his Amcit wife. Very high-level USG officials have approved the plan; DOD is on board, according to Edde.

SAUDIS TO SAY NO

16. (C) Thus, Edde told Khoja that Saudi approval was the final step needed before implementation. Khoja told Edde he would have to consult with his government and respond later. In the meantime, the Saudis told Khoja "no way," a red light message that Khoja has not yet had the opportunity to convey back to Edde (currently in Cannes for the film festival). But Saudi vetoes aside, Khoja asked whether it is possible that the USG might support such a plan. The Ambassador responded that it was difficult to imagine USG enthusiasm for a plan that was hatched with the backing of Lahoud, Hizballah, and Syria. Khoja seemed satisfied with the answer.

SAAD HARIRI SAYS NO;
JUMBLATT REMAINS SUSPICIOUS

17. (C) Later on 5/19, MP Saad Hariri, chuckling momentarily about the "amazing plan" of Edde, insisted that the Hariri family itself said no. Whatever Nazek Hariri's problem with Fouad Siniora, the answer was not to replace Siniora with Nazek now. Saad insisted that Nazek had immediately said no to Edde's advances. (Khoja, by contrast, suspected that Nazek would have found the opportunity to kick the hated Siniora out of the Grand Serail irresistible.) The Ambassador later spoke with French Ambassador Bernard Emie at a reception both attended. Expressing astonishment over the tale, which he was hearing for the first time, Emie said that he could imagine a scenario by which French officials

actually support such a "crazy scheme." Emie called the Paris-based Hariri legal advisor Basile Yared, asking Yared whether he had heard of a "new idea involving the lady." Yared assured Emie that the idea was "dead."

18. (C) Briefed by phone later, the ever-suspicious Jumblatt wondered if Edde, "a fishy guy," would really give up so easily. Edde, Jumblatt noted, always claims to have high-level USG and French contacts, and Nazek truly hates Siniora. Edde's ambition and the Widow Hariri's loathing of Siniora are a bad combination, Jumblatt said.

COMMENT

19. (C) When Lebanon's political history for 2007 is written, we hope that Edde's proposal turns out to be merely a mildly amusing footnote. But Khoja, like Jumblatt, was taking it fairly seriously. What seems to worry them is the possibility that forces allied with Syria could exploit Nazek Hariri's sense of outrage that the current occupant of the Grand Serail offices and residence of the Prime Minister is Fouad Siniora and not a Hariri family member. With Jacques Chirac now out of office, Nazek's political influence, exercised via Chirac ever since Saad Hariri's assumption of the political leadership of the family, seems certain to diminish. Thus she might have considered Edde's proposal a kind of political lifeline. We remember that the Saudis intervened twice before this to discourage Nazek's ambitions: soon after Rafiq Hariri's murder, when the Hariri family (prompted in part by Saudi Arabia) anointed Saad, not Nazek or Saad's elder brother Baha', to carry on the political legacy, and again after the 2005 elections when Nazek considered herself to be a worthy contender for prime minister. We also hear from an increasing number of people that Syria, Hizballah, and Emile Lahoud are determined, above all, to kick Siniora out of the Grand Serail once and for all. (Resigned Minister of Health Mohammed Khalifeh, allied with Parliament Speaker Berri, told the Ambassador in a 5/19 meeting that it would be easier to find a cabinet compromise if March 14 would jettison Siniora in favor of "almost anyone else.") So, in a classic case of politics making strange bedfellows, there is overlap between their goal and Nazek's hopes.

FELTMAN